



BATTLE OF ORSHA



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The Battle of Orsha, was fought on 8 September 1514, between the allied forces of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland, under the command of Lithuanian Grand Hetman Konstanty Ostrogski; and the army of the Grand Duchy of Moscow under Konyushy Ivan Chelyadnin and Kniaz Mikhail Bulgakov-Golitsa. The Battle of Orsha was part of a long series of Muscovite–Lithuanian Wars conducted by Muscovite rulers striving to gather all the former Kievan Rus' lands under their rule.

According to Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii by Sigismund von Herberstein, the primary source for information on the battle, the much smaller army of Lithuania–Poland (under 30,000 men) defeated a force of 80,000 Muscovite soldiers, capturing their camp and commander. These numbers and proportions have been disputed by some modern historians.

At the end of 1512, the Grand Duchy of Moscow began a new war for the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's Ruthenian lands in present-day Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. Albrecht I, Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, rebelled and refused to give a vassal pledge to Sigismund I the Old of Poland-Lithuania, as required by the Second Peace of Thorn (1466). Albrecht I was supported by Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor.

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Territorial expansion of the Grand Duchy of Moscow, 1300–1547
Territory in 1300 **Territory in 1389, after the final merging of Moscow and Vladimir** **Territory in 1505, on the death of Ivan III** **Territory in 1533, on the death of Vasily III**
Modern national borders are shown for orientation.

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**The Moscow Kremlin
under Ivan Kalita,
painting by Apollinary
Vasnetsov, 1921**

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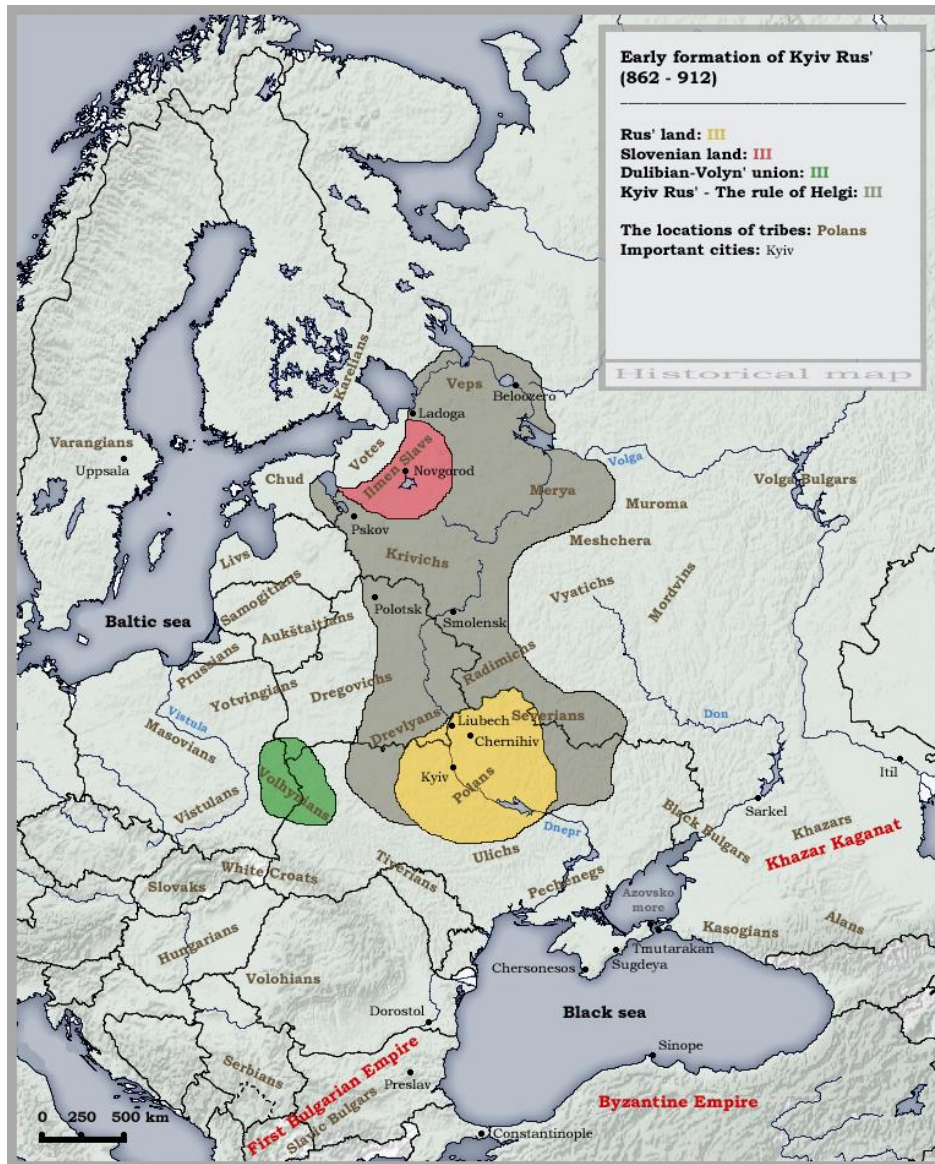
The Grand Duchy of Lithuania at the height of its power in the 15th century.

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a sovereign state in northeastern Europe that existed from the 13th century, succeeding the Kingdom of Lithuania, to the late 18th century,[6] when the territory was suppressed during the 1795 partitions of Poland–Lithuania. The state was founded by Lithuanians, who were at the time a polytheistic nation of several united Baltic tribes from Aukštaitija. By 1440 the grand duchy had become the largest European state, controlling an area from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south.

**GRAND DUCHY OF LITHUANIA
c. 1236–1795**



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Rus' land/Ruthenia in yellow, Kievan Rus' under Oleg the Wise in gray, 862-912

Ruthenia is an exonym, originally used in Medieval Latin, as one of several terms for Rus'. Originally, the term Rus' land referred to a triangular area, which mainly corresponds to the tribe of Polans in Dnieper Ukraine. Ruthenia was used to refer to the East Slavic and Eastern Orthodox people of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland, and later the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Austria-Hungary, mainly to Ukrainians and sometimes Belarusians, corresponding to the territories of modern Belarus, Ukraine, Eastern Poland and some of western Russia.

The Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria (1772–1918), corresponding to parts of Western Ukraine, was referred to as Ruthenia and its people as Ruthenians. As a result of a Ukrainian national identity gradually dominating over much of present-day Ukraine in the 19th and 20th centuries, the endonym Rusyn is now mostly used among a minority of peoples on the territory of the Carpathian Mountains, including Carpathian Ruthenia.

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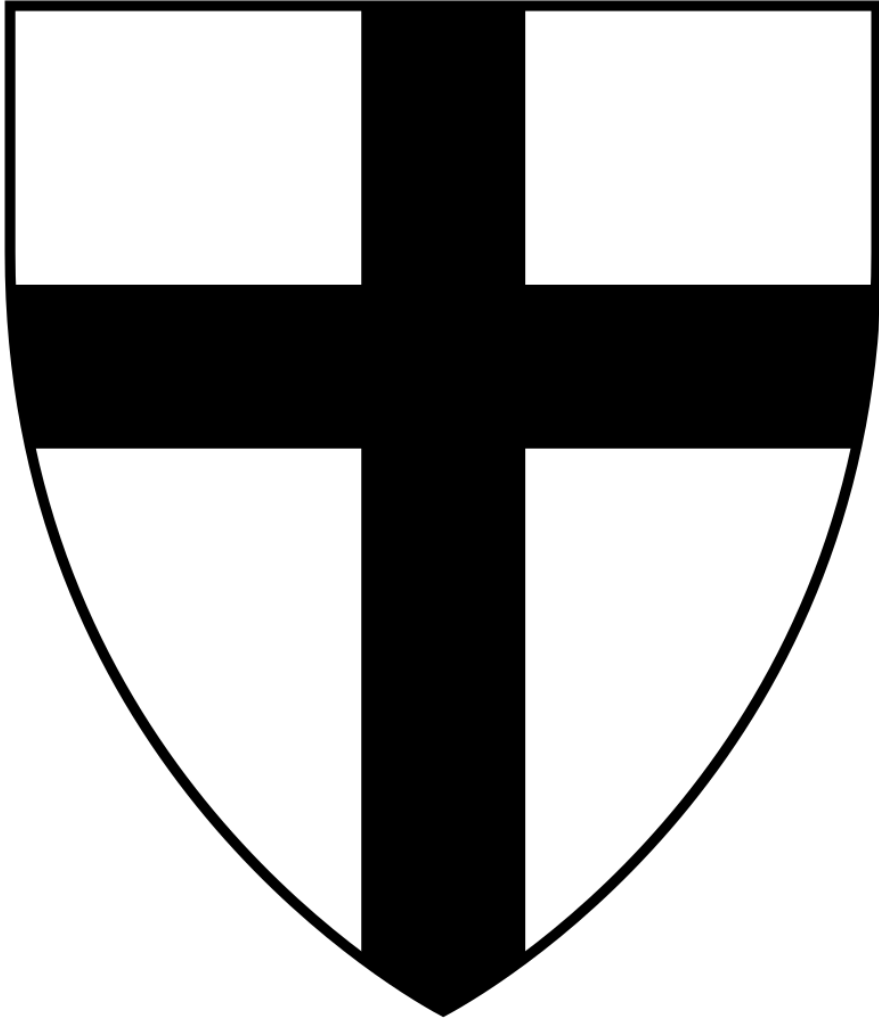
Albert of Prussia (German: Albrecht von Preussen; 17 May 1490 – 20 March 1568) was a German prince who was the 37th grand master of the Teutonic Knights and, after converting to Lutheranism, became the first ruler of the Duchy of Prussia, the secularized state that emerged from the former Monastic State of the Teutonic Knights. Albert was the first European ruler to establish Lutheranism, and thus Protestantism, as the official state religion of his lands.

He proved instrumental in the political spread of Protestantism in its early stage, ruling the Prussian lands for nearly six decades (1510–1568). Albert's rule in Prussia was fairly prosperous. Although he had some trouble with the peasantry, the confiscation of the lands and treasures of the Catholic Church enabled him to propitiate the nobles and provide for the expenses of the newly established Prussian court.

He was active in imperial politics, joining the League of Torgau in 1526, and acted in unison with the Protestants in plotting to overthrow Emperor Charles V after the issue of the Augsburg Interim in May 1548.



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The Teutonic Order is a Catholic religious institution founded as a military society c. 1190 in Acre, Kingdom of Jerusalem. The Order of Brothers of the German House of Saint Mary in Jerusalem was formed to aid Christians on their pilgrimages to the Holy Land and to establish hospitals. Its members have commonly been known as the Teutonic Knights, having historically served as a crusading military order for supporting Catholic rule in the Holy Land and the Northern Crusades during the Middle Ages, as well as supplying military protection for Catholics in Eastern Europe.



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Sigismund I the Old (1 January 1467 – 1 April 1548) was King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania from 1506 until his death in 1548. Sigismund I was a member of the Jagiellonian dynasty, the son of Casimir IV and younger brother of Kings John I Albert and Alexander I Jagiellon. He was nicknamed "the Old" in later historiography to distinguish him from his son and successor, Sigismund II Augustus. Before ascending to the Polish and Lithuanian thrones, he was Duke of Głogów from 1499, Duke of Opava from 1501, and governor of Silesia from 1504 on behalf of his brother, King Vladislaus II of Bohemia and Hungary. A capable monarch and a patron of arts, Sigismund established Polish rule over Ducal Prussia and annexed the Duchy of Mazovia with Warsaw, while retaining the nation's wealth and prominence in the region. He made sure that his nephew Albert, Duke of Prussia, and Albert's Protestant successors would pay feudal homage or tribute to Polish monarchs as a sign of political and diplomatic dependence. This was observed until the Treaty of Bromberg in 1657 when Prussia gained its sovereignty. Sigismund and his commander Jan Amor Tarnowski also defeated Moldavia at Obertyn in 1531, and Muscovy in 1535, thereby strengthening the country's eastern borders.



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The Peace of Thorn or Toruń of 1466, also known as the Second Peace of Thorn or Toruń was a peace treaty signed in the Hanseatic city of Thorn (Toruń) on 19 October 1466 between the Polish king Casimir IV Jagiellon and the Teutonic Knights, which ended the Thirteen Years' War, the longest of the Polish–Teutonic Wars.

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Maximilian I (22 March 1459 – 12 January 1519) was King of the Romans from 1486 and Holy Roman Emperor from 1508 until his death in 1519. He was never crowned by the Pope, as the journey to Rome was blocked by the Venetians. He proclaimed himself elected emperor in 1508 at Trent, with Pope Julius II later recognizing it. This broke the tradition of requiring a papal coronation for the adoption of the Imperial title. Maximilian was the only surviving son of Frederick III, Holy Roman Emperor, and Eleanor of Portugal. From his coronation as King of the Romans in 1486, he ran a double government, or Doppelregierung with his father until Frederick's death in 1493. Maximilian expanded the influence of the House of Habsburg through war and his marriage in 1477 to Mary, Duchess of Burgundy. However, he also lost his family's lands in Switzerland to the Swiss Confederacy. Through the marriage of his son Philip the Handsome to eventual queen Joanna of Castile in 1496, Maximilian helped to establish the Habsburg dynasty in Spain, which allowed his grandson Charles to hold the thrones of both Castile and Aragon.[8] Historian Thomas A. Brady Jr. describes him as "the first Holy Roman Emperor in 250 years who ruled as well as reigned" and the "ablest royal warlord of his generation".



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Smolensk is a city and the administrative center of Smolensk Oblast, Russia, located on the Dnieper River, 360 kilometers (220 mi) west-southwest of Moscow.

First mentioned in 863, it is one of the oldest cities in Russia. It has been a regional capital for most of the past millennium, beginning as the capital of an eponymous principality in the 11th-15th centuries, then the Smolensk Voivodeship of Lithuania and Poland, and Smolensk Governorate and Oblast within Russia.



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The fortress of Smolensk was then the easternmost outpost of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and one of the most important strongholds guarding it from the east. It repelled several Muscovite attacks, but in July 1514 a Muscovite army besieged and finally captured it. Spurred on by this initial success, the Grand Prince of Moscow Vasili III ordered his forces farther into present-day Belarus, occupying the towns of Krichev, Mstislavl, and Dubrovna.

Meanwhile, Sigismund the Old gathered some 35,000 troops, most of whom (57%) were Poles, for war with his eastern neighbor. His army was inferior in numbers, but consisted mostly of well-trained cavalry.

The regular Polish army was commanded by Janusz Świerczowski [pl]. It was the largest one that the Crown had hitherto put in the field. Wojciech Sampoliński [de] was in charge of the private Polish detachments and household troops. The Lithuanian landed service (some 15,000 soldiers) was led by Grand Hetman Konstanty Ostrogski and Field Hetman Jerzy Radziwiłł. The Lithuanian-Polish forces included 32,500 cavalry and 3,000 mercenary infantry. Sigismund left 4,000–5,000 men in the town of Barysau, while the main force, placed under the command of Hetman Konstanty Ostrogski and around 30,000 strong, moved on to face the Muscovites.[

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At the end of August, several skirmishes took place at the crossings of the Berezina, Bobr, and Drut Rivers, but the Muscovite army avoided a major confrontation.

Suffering negligible losses, the Muscovites advanced to the area between Orsha and Dubrovno on the Krapivna River, where they set up camp. Ivan Chelyadnin, confident that the Lithuanian–Polish forces would have to cross one of the two bridges on the Dnieper River, split his own forces to guard those crossings. However, Ostrogski's army crossed the river farther north via two pontoon bridges. On the night of 7 September, the Lithuanian-Polish army began preparations for a final battle with the Muscovites. Hetman Konstantyn Ostrogski placed most of his 16,000 horses from the Grand Duchy in the center, while most of the Polish infantry and the auxiliary troops manned the flanks. The Bohemian and Silesian infantry were deployed in the center of the line, in front of the reserves comprising Lithuanian and Polish cavalry.

Size of the Muscovite army

The size of the Muscovite army remains an unsolved question. Narrative Lithuanian sources generally give large numbers. King Sigismund wrote to Pope Leo X about a "horde of Muscovites" which consisted of 80,000 men.

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Sigismund also claimed that his army had killed 30,000 Muscovites and taken prisoner 46 commanders and 1,500 nobles. Extant Polish and Lithuanian documents, however, list all captured nobles by name; only 611 men in all. The Polish historian Bohun considers it improvident to rely on what he terms "propaganda data" given by Sigismund. According to the Sigismund description of the disposition of the Russian troops, each regiment outnumbered even modern divisions. Gembarowicz (another Polish researcher) is of the opinion that the Muscovite army was about 40,000 strong. It also remains unclear why – if the figure of 70,000–80,000 men is to be trusted – King Sigismund (who knew about this superiority of the Muscovite army from Mikhail Glinsky's letters) kept a personal guard of about 5,000 men (about 15% of his army) in reserve, without sending them into the battle. The Muscovite chronicles (Novgorodian and Sophian codexes) claim a Lithuanian numerical superiority.



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The Russian historian A. Lobin tried to calculate the size of the Muscovite army at Orsha based on the mobilisation capacities of the towns which had to send townspeople for military service. It is known that except for Boyar sons of the sovereign's regiment, the army consisted of people from at least 14 towns: Novgorod, Pskov, Velikie Luki, Kostroma, Murom, Borovsk, Tver, Volok, Roslavl, Vyazma, Pereyaslavl, Kolomna, Yaroslavl, and Starodub. Based on figures from the well-documented Polotsk campaign of 1563, the author gives the following estimates: 400–500 Tatars, 200 boyar sons of the sovereign's regiment, 3,000 Novgorodian and Pskovians, and about 3,600 representatives of other towns, altogether about 7,200 noblemen.

Once servants are included, the overall size of the Muscovite army could be 13,000–15,000 men. Considering the losses during the campaign, the level of desertion which is documented in the sources and the number of soldiers left as a garrison in Smolensk; the number of Muscovite troops present at Orsha could have been as low as about 12,000 men. This calculation method has been backed by Brian Davies (University of Texas at San Antonio), and Russian historians N. Smirnov, A. Pankov, O. Kurbatov, M. Krom, and V. Penskoj. An earlier estimate also noted that at the beginning of the 16th century, the Russia could not even gather 40,000 in its ranks. Vitaly Penskoj analyzing the structure of the Russian army, also came to the conclusion that in the largest military campaigns under Vasily III, Muscovites could not have more than 20,000.

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On 8 September, shortly after dawn, Ivan Chelyadnin gave the order to attack. The Muscovite forces attempted to outflank the Lithuanians and Poles by attacking their flanks, which were manned by Polish, Lithuanian light hussar, and Tartar troops. One of the pincers of the attack was commanded by Chelyadnin personally, while the other was led by Prince Bulgakov-Golitsa. The initial attack failed, and the Muscovites withdrew toward their starting positions. Chelyadnin was still confident that the odds, almost 3:1 in his favor, would give him the victory. However, preoccupied with his own wing of the Muscovite forces, he lost track of the other sectors and failed to coordinate a defense against the counterattack by the Lithuanian light and Polish heavy cavalry, which until then had been kept in reserve.

The Lithuanian and Polish light horse and Tartars attacked the overstretched center of the Muscovite lines in an attempt to split them. At the crucial moment the Polish cavalry seemed to waver, then went into retreat. The Muscovites pursued with all their cavalry reserves. The Lithuanian Tartars and Polish cavalry, after retreating for several minutes under chase from the Russians, suddenly turned to the sides. The Muscovite cavalry now found themselves confronted by artillery concealed in the forest. From both sides, Lithuanian forces appeared and proceeded to surround the Muscovites. Ivan Chelyadnin sounded retreat, which soon became somewhat panicked. The Muscovite forces were pursued by the army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania for five kilometres.

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The Muscovite defeat is often attributed to repeated failures by Ivan Chelyadnin and Mikhail Golitsa to coordinate their operations.

Sigismund von Herberstein reported that 40,000 Muscovites were killed. According to accounts in Polish chronicles, 30,000 Russians were killed and an additional 3,000 were taken captive, including Ivan Chelyadnin and eight other commanders. The forces of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania seized the Muscovite camp and all 300 cannons. Upset at word of the massive defeat, Grand Prince Vasili III allegedly remarked that "the prisoners [were] as useful as the dead".



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Ostrogski's forces continued their pursuit of the routed Russian army and retook most of the previously captured strongholds, including Mstislavl and Krychev, and the advancement of the Russians was stopped for four years. However, the Lithuanian and Polish forces were too exhausted to besiege Smolensk before the winter. This meant that Ostrogski did not reach the gates of Smolensk until late September, giving Vasili III enough time to prepare defense.

In December, Hetman Konstanty Ostrogski triumphantly entered Vilnius. To commemorate the victory, two Orthodox churches were erected: the Church of the Holy Trinity and the Church of Saint Nicholas, which remain among the most impressive examples of Eastern Orthodox Church architecture in Lithuania. Immediately after the victory, the Polish–Lithuanian state started to exploit the battle for its propaganda aimed at other nations in Europe, with the intent of improving the image of Poland-Lithuania abroad. Several panegyric accounts of the battle were sent to Rome. "The Polish message was similar to Bomhover's: the Muscovites are not Christians; they are cruel and barbaric; they are Asians and not Europeans; they are in league with Turks and the Tatars to destroy Christendom". Impressed by the scope of the Lithuanian and Polish victory, Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor, started peace negotiations with the Jagiellons in Vienna. On 22 July 1515, final agreements for peace were made and the broad coalition against Lithuania and Poland ceased.

The war between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Grand Duchy of Moscow lasted until 1520. In 1522 a peace was signed, under the terms of which Lithuania was forced to cede to Moscow about a quarter of its possessions within the lands of the former Kievan Rus', including Smolensk. The latter city was not retaken until almost a century later, in 1611. After the peace agreement of 1522, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania tried to attack Moscow one more time, but major military conflicts were settled for around 40 years.